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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether significant public speaking anxiety is present in an adult elective speech course and to determine whether speech anxiety can be lowered with the use of post-speech conferences. Subjects were 74 undergraduate students enrolled in four sections of a night elective course in public speaking. The Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) was used concurrently with follow-up student conferences after speech performances. Students completed a questionnaire describing their performance feelings and feedback immediately following two speech assignments, and then met with the instructor in conference to discuss the questionnaire responses. Students also completed the PRPSA before and after the course. The five resulting anxiety levels ranged from very low to very high. The results of the pretest and posttest scores indicated differences of 2 to 51 points. Of the total, 25 students lowered their anxiety score by two levels, 5 by three levels, and 2 by four levels; 20 did not change their level from pretest to posttest; and 3 students' scores remained constant, while 11 lowered their score somewhat but not enough to constitute a complete level. (HTH)

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Adult Speech Anxiety: A New Look At A Recurring Phenomenon

by

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A Paper Submitted to the Community College Section, Speech Communication Association

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The Speech communication discipline has long been concerned with students who maintain that they are afraid to give public speeches. This fear, often referred to as stage fright, speech anxiety, reticence or communication apprehension was indeed reported to be the number one fear of adult Americans. As incredible as it may seem, "Speaking before a group" was ranked as a greater fear for adults than financial ruin, sickness and even death.[1] Obviously, this repeated expression of severe anxiety over speech performance should be a major concern for college speech teachers or others who work as trainers in business, industrial, and governmental sectors.[2]

More recent research in this area has found that stage fright is only one part of a larger phenomenon called "communication apprehension".[3] While significant minorities of college students may also suffer from apprehension about writing, musical performance, or taking examinations this paper's emphasis will be upon those adult students who elect a public speaking course.

Some degree of nervousness prior to or while giving a speech is considered normal, yet not everyone who experiences this symptom is speech anxious. Therefore, my research was designed to: 1) determine if significant public speaking anxiety is present in an adult elective speech course, and; 2) to quantify if significant lowering of anxiety can occur by the use of post-speech conferencing and administration of a pre-test and a post-test at the end of the course.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to report on a structured classroom strategy where use of the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (hereafter referred to as P.R.P.S.A.)[4] was used concurrently with follow-up student conferences after speech performances. Because the strategy was designed to test a skills training method, a structured course approach with units, objectives and pre-determined evaluation forms was used.

Participants:

The subjects in this study were 80 undergraduate students enrolled in four sections of Sp. 137 - Public Speaking, a course offered as a night class during the four academic quarters of 1982 at Northern Virginia Community College. The composition of the groups were evenly divided between male and females and had an age spread from 19 years to 56 with the mean age of 29.[5] Because the course is not a specific curriculum requirement in any of the 103 two-year programs of study,[6] all students who enrolled in the course did so to complete elective course requirements or for personal enrichment.

Course Content:

Speech 137 is a three credit hour ten-week course in which the primary objective is to develop skill in public speaking. Because of the constraints imposed upon the class by the quarter calendar, the class was taught with strong emphasis upon speech practice. Text-book support was provided with reading assignments from Ehninger, Gronbeck and Monroe's Principles of Speech Communication, 8th brief edition.[7] Occasional video models were used for exemplification along with one commercial Time-Life video production, "How To Make a More

Effective Presentation."[8] Three major speech assignments were performed by all students: 1) a "Personal Experience" speech, 3-4 minutes in length with no paper requirements, i.e. objective statement, outline, or bibliography;[9] 2) a Speech to Inform, 6-8 minutes, with a visual aid and requiring a content outline with speech title, objective and a list of sources; 3) a Speech to Persuade (sales talk), 6-8 minutes, with a visual aid (product or facsimile) and requiring a content outline with the same provisions as Speech #2. At the conclusion of each speech students were asked to complete a one-page questionnaire of only two questions: 1) How did you feel while performing for this audience?; 2) What type of feedback did you receive from your listeners?

Upon completion of this questionnaire, students were asked to meet at a designated conference time with the instructor prior to the following week's class. Because of time constraints and conflicts with work schedules, some conferences were held via telephone during the work-day. Set office hours were maintained for such purposes.

Instrument of Measurement:

The PRPSA is a paper-and-pencil instrument consisting of thirty-four statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people in a one-to-many setting. The respondent indicates the degree to which the statements apply to them by marking a restricted response scale: a #1 (strongly agree); a #2 (agree); a #3 (undecided); a #4 (disagree) or a #5 (strongly disagree). The statements are stated in first person with personal pronouns used to encourage the respondent's own identification. For example, "My hands tremble when I am giving a speech," "I perspire just before starting a speech," "I breathe faster just before starting a speech," and "My heart beats

very fast while I present a speech."[10]

Raw scores are determined by a system of addition of certain factors and the exclusion of others so that a mathematical formula provides a total raw score. The range of the instrument is 34 to 170; any total composite raw score below 34 or above 170 is not possible.

Raw scores are equated to five levels of public speaking anxiety as diagrammed in Display #6. According to researchers McCroskey and Richmond, several thousand college students have completed the PRPSA and the results show again the significant anxiety levels present in one-to-many communication events. For instance, the analysis as reported by the researchers reveals that 40% of all those tested fall into levels 5 or very "high anxiety"; 30% fall into level 4 or "moderately high anxiety"; 20% fall into level 3 or "moderate anxiety"; and 5% score in level 2 or "moderately low anxiety", while only 5% score in level 1 or "very low anxiety".[11]

Display #6

Scale for Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety

Raw Score:	34 - 84	Very Low Anxiety Level - Level 1
	85 - 92	Moderately Low Levels - Level 2
	93 - 110	Moderate Anxiety Level - Level 3
	111 - 119	Moderately High Level - Level 4
	120 - 170	Very High Anxiety Level - Level 5

In addition to a pre-and-post administration of the PRPSA, students conferences followed Sp. #1 and Sp. #3.[12] These conferences focused upon the one-page questionnaire that each student completed and the instructor's evaluation form. At no time during these conferences were PRPSA scores identified or discussed. At the final meeting of the class, however, a 5"x8" card was given to each student with the pre and post scores identified with changes of levels explained.

Results:

The year-long study has produced unique results with the elective adult populations during the four quarters of 1982. The Winter Quarter class totaled 24 students initially; two dropped the course.[13] With a range of 73 to 143 on the pre-test, the group's post-test score narrowed to a range of 73 to 110. Differences of two to 51 points occurred when pre and post-test scores are calculated. Of the total, six students (27%) lowered their anxiety score by one level; seven (32%) lowered their anxiety score by two levels; one student (5%) lowered his anxiety score by three levels; one student (5%) lowered his anxiety score by four levels and seven (32%) did not change their level from pre-test to post-test. Of these seven, only one increased the score but not a change to a higher anxiety level; one student's score remained constant while the other five lowered their score somewhat but not to constitute a complete level of change.

Display #1

P.R.P.S.A. Results - Winter Class, 1982

Student	Pre-Score	Post-Score	Difference	Level Change
W-1	115	110	+5	1
W-2	143	92	+51	3
W-3	96	80	+16	2
W-4	101	91	+10	1
W-5	86	82	+4	1
W-6	73	73	0	0
W-7	105	94	+11	1
W-8	124	80	+44	4
W-9	138	110	+28	2
W-10	94	82	+8	1
W-11	98	---	---	--
W-12	131	101	+30	2
W-13	102	96	+6	0
W-14	82	80	+2	0
W-15	78	72	+6	0
W-16	123	101	+22	2
W-17	106	96	+8	1
W-18	112	90	+22	2
W-19	85	89	-4	0
W-20	124	102	+22	2
W-21	102	92	+10	0
W-22	86	---	---	--
W-23	109	93	+16	0
W-24	143	96	+47	2
Mean:	106.5	91	16.5	1.22
S.D. σ:	20.32	10.6	15.3	

Conclusions:
6 - 27% - lowered score 1 level
7 - 32% - lowered score 2 levels
1 - 5% - lowered score 3 levels
1 - 5% - lowered score 4 levels
*7 - 32% - no change in score

*Note: only one in class increased score but not to a higher level; one student's score remained constant; the other five lowered their score but not a complete level.

Other depictations of the Spring, Summer and Fall class populations are computated in Displays #2, #3 and #4.[14] To narratively describe each is not necessary here. However, the summary of all four classes does provide significant quantification of levels of public speaking anxiety. The Winter class had a mean pre-score of 106.5 or "moderate anxiety level." The post-test mean was 91.0 or

"moderately low anxiety levels." The degree of changes, however, are more pronounced when one analyzes the complete display. The Spring class had a mean pre-score of 117.0 or "moderately high public speaking anxiety." The post-test mean was 92.5 for an average change of 1.47 levels.[15] The Summer class had the lowest changes exhibited by all four groups with a pre-test mean of 95.8 and a post-test mean of 88.2 for a change factor of +.81.[16] The Fall quarter class rounded out the year-long analysis with a pre-test mean of 104.41 and a post-test mean of 86.1 or a change factor of +1.16.[17]

The significance of the computer analysis of the entire population does not appear evident until one looks at individual scores as depicted in Display #5 - Students who Completed the Course. These results show clearly that, indeed, major changes occurred in the PRPSA scores. Two students (2.7% of 74) lowered their anxiety by four levels; five students (6.8% of 74) lowered their anxiety by three levels; twenty-five students lowered their anxiety by two levels while eighteen (24.3%) lowered their anxiety by one level. Of the total, only 20 students (27.0%) had no change in level. Three of the "No change" group had the same pre-and-post raw score; six of the "No change" increased the raw score on the post test but not by one level of significance; eleven of the "No change" group reduced the raw score but not by one level of significance. Surprisingly, four students (5.4%) did increase the raw score so that their level of public speaking anxiety was increased by one level.[18]

Display #5

P.R.P.S.A. Summary of Statistics - all classes

Total Scores by Class

	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Average Change of Level
Winter '82	106.5	91.0	+1.22
Spring '82	117.0	92.5	+1.47
Summer '82	95.8	88.2	+ .81
Fall '82	104.41	86.1	+1.16
Total:	107.21	89.47	+1.18

74 Students Who Complete Courses

2 Students lowered anxiety scale score 4 levels -- 2.7%

5 Students lowered anxiety scale score 3 levels -- 6.8%

25 Students lowered anxiety scale score 2 levels -- 33.8%

18 Students lowered anxiety scale score 1 level -- 24.3%

20 No Change in Level -- 27.0%

a) 3 of No Change had same pre and post score
b) 6 of No Change incresed scale score but not one level
c) 11 of No Change reduced scale score but not one level

4 Students increased anxiety scale score 1 level -- 5.4%

Conclusions:

The study was designed to apply a structured strategy of skills training to four classes of adult elective public speaking classes. As such, the identification of levels of anxiety was necessary. Of the 80 students who completed the preliminary PRPSA, only 12 (or 15%) had a raw score below 84 (very low anxiety level = 34-84). This

statistic seems to be slightly higher than McCroskey and Richmond's initial report of 5% who score nationally at this level. However, the population characteristic difference may have significant bearing here in that the N.V.C.C. average class age was probably much higher (29) and the courses chosen for study were elective rather than required speech communication courses.

The N.V.C.C. study revealed major lowering of pre-test raw scores and hence speech anxiety levels as well. Of the 74 students (92.5%) who completed the course with exposure to three classroom speech experiences and concomitant follow-up conferences, 54 students (72.97%) demonstrated statistical changes in raw scores. These changes vary in anxiety of one level (24.3% of total) to four (2.7% of total). The greatest number of changes occurred with 25 students (33.8%) who lowered their anxiety by two levels. An individual analysis of each student can't be provided here but the total "mean" for the entire population is important to note. At the start of the course, the composite raw score was 107.21; at the end of the course the composite raw score had dropped to 89.47 for a difference of 17.74.

74 Students Who Complete Courses

2 Students	lowered anxiety scale score 4 levels --	2.7%
5 Students	lowered anxiety scale score 3 levels --	6.8%
25 Students	lowered anxiety scale score 2 levels --	33.8%
18 Students	lowered anxiety scale score 1 level --	24.3%
20 No Change	in Level --	27.0%

a) 3 of No Change had some pre and post score
b) 6 of No Change increased scale score but not one level
c) 11 of No Change reduced scale score but not one level

4 Students increased anxiety scale score 1 level -- 5.4%

Implications of Study

Although no control groups were studied to show statistical comparison between classes with conferencing and without it, a natural spin-off effect of conferencing may be reduction of grade-induced anxiety. Getting to know more personally and privately one's instructor, discussing reasons why certain speaker fears are natural and even positive, examining the grading criteria, etc. all may serve to generally reduce tension between student speaker and instructor. Consequently, control groups need to be studied which have no required out-of-class conferences so as to determine if this variable does really show significant difference.

Researchers Watson and Dodd have recently reported a study of 52 high communication apprehensives completed at the University of Rhode Island during 1983.[19] The group was randomly assigned to three treatment groups (classes) for a semester. After exposure to three strategies, Watson and Dodd concluded that all three approaches work equally as well in reducing anxiety: 1) Rational Emotive Therapy, 2) systematic desensitization and 3) skills development. However, none of these groups were exposed to conferencing techniques during the study. Would the use of the N.V.C.C. approach have produced a significant effect? Would a larger population than 52 show greater statistical variance? Can the P.R.P.S.A. as a pre-test predict behavior change using any of the three strategies? Finally the design and implementation of such a year-long classroom study in a Community College is obviously time-consuming and exacting. Scoring of the P.R.P.S.A. alone takes meticulous use of calculators as Scantron (machine score) isn't possible. Conferences

with all students present numerous scheduling problems. Management of the paper-flow on student questionnaires, evaluation sheets, pre-test and post-test copy, and student end-of-course reports, in themselves, represent determined commitment to the task. Can additional refinement of the P.R.P.S.A. make it more manageable as a classroom instrument? Can computer-assisted administration of the scale be devised?

All of these implications merely begin to explore adult speech anxiety. Obviously, there remain many areas to be investigated in this recurring phenomenon.

Footnotes

[1]"What Are Americans Afraid Of?" The Bruskin Report, 1973, No. 53, as reported in Spectra, vol. 9, December, 1973, p. 4.

[2]"Surveys Reveal Students Concern Over Jobs, Public Speaking Anxiety," Pittsburg News, May 7, 1978, p. 4. Also, London Sunday Times survey of adults as reported in "Speaking Effectively....To One or One Thousand," videotape, Delmar, California: C.R.W. McGraw-Hills Films, 1980.

[3]Zimbardo, Phillip G. "Shyness - The People Phobia," a national survey with analysis, Today's Education (Jan.-Feb., 1977), pp. 47-49. Also, see Hoffmann, Jon and Sprague, Jr. "A Survey of Reticence and Communication Apprehension Treatment Programs at U.S. Colleges and Universities," Communication Education, Vol. 31, No. 3, (July, 1982), pp. 185-193.

[4]For scoring and analysis of the instrument, see McCroskey and Richmond, The Quiet Ones: Communication Apprehension and Shyness Dubuque, Iowa: Gorsuch Scarisbrick, Publishers, 1980, pp. 14-16.

[5]Age was not a known factor at the time of class performance but was identified by the Office of Institutional Research, N.V.C.C., using computer analysis. See Office of Institutional Research, Student Profiles for Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall, 1982.

[6]Northern Virginia Community College 1982-83 Catalogue, Instructional Programs by Major, pp. 33-34.

[7]Ehninger, Douglas, Gronbeck, Bruce E., Monroe, Alan H. Principles of Speech Communication, 8th Brief Edition. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980.

[8]Communicating Successfully: Lesson 1 - "How To Make A More Effective Speech," a Time-Life Video Productions: New York: Time-Life Video, 1973.

[9]See "Personal Interest Assignment," in Arthur A. Kruger's Effective Public Speaking, New York: Von Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970, pp. 417-421.

[10]McCroskey and Richmond, op. cit., p. 15.

[11]Ibid.

[12]A teaching technique used by Ms. Denny Natt, in English 111 - Freshman Composition, N.V.C.C., and analyzed in Thomas A. Carnicelli's "The Writing Conference: A One-To-One Conversation," in Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition, ed. Timothy A. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland, Urhona, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1980.

[13]Display #1, P.R.P.S.A. Results - Winter Class, 1982.

[14]Display #2, #3, #4, P.R.P.S.A. Results - Spring, Summer and Fall Classes, 1982.

[15]Display #5 - Summary of Statistics, All Classes.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Arden K. Watson and Carley H. Dodd, "Alleviating Communication Apprehension Through Rational Emotive Therapy: A Comparative Evaluation," Communication Education (33) July, 1984, pp. 257-266.

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"Speaking to One-or-One Thousand," Delmar, Calif.: C.R.W. McGraw-Hill Films, 1980.

Instructional Materials

"Spdr. 137 - Public Speaking," a syllabus designed by Blanton Croft for a ten-week course, Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge Campus, 1982.

- Assignment #1 - Personal Interest Speech
- Assignment #2 - Speech To Inform
- Assignment #3 - Speech To Persuade (Sales Talk)

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